



Dove Bradshaw, Contingency, 1985, silver, liver of sulfur on paper, 32 c 24 inches

**Anastasi, Bradshaw, Cage,
Marioni, Rauschenberg, Tobey**

-imitating nature in her manner of operation-

Sandra Gering Gallery December 8, 1990- January 19, 1991

By Bruce Atschuler

This exhibition takes its motto from John Cage's description of his own artistic practice—"...imitating nature in her manner of operation..."—and it consists of pieces by the composer and by artists in his collection. Influenced by Zen teaching, Cage adopted chance methods of composition so as to avoid determination by personal preference, rejecting individual

expression as an aesthetic end. Instead, the artist became a conduit for, and the work an index of, the action of the surrounding world. In this Cage's motivation opposed that of Surrealism in its use of the accidental, pointing away from psychic display to a new kind of realism.

The monotypes by Mark Tobey in the show recall his influence on Cage, evoking the centerless fields of abstract writing that enabled the composer to look at the sidewalk with the same interest he found in the paintings themselves. Rauschenberg's white paintings prompted him to transfer such experiences to sound with his 4'33" of silence, a move brought back to two dimensions here in Cage's lovely print impression of an unaltered etching plate. And in its funky lack of pretension, the Rauschenberg in the exhibition – a crumpled piece of soiled ledger paper—epitomizes the found object as chance creation.

In his musical and verbal compositions, Cage collaborates with chance by means of formal procedures employing the *I Ching*, an approach carried through with beautiful effect in his series of drawings *Where R=Ryoanji*. There are 15 rocks in the Zen garden of *Ryoanji* in Kyoto. With process-repetition and even the hardness of pencil lead determined by chance, Cage outlines 15 stones positioned on a grid according to chance-generated coordinates.

Non-intention is exemplified in a very different way by the subway drawings of William Anastasi, done almost daily since 1977 on his way downtown to play chess with cage. Made with eyes closed wearing soundproof headphones, pad on knees and a sharpened pencil in each hand, these drawings record the jostling of the train—and considered as a group they constitute one of the most important chance-dependant artworks. They are complemented by some of his blind drawings, another attempt to subvert art-historical imagery and the influence of the trained hand. Anastasi's approach here is paralleled by that of Tom Marioni, whose drawings exhaust a graphite source through repetitive vertical movements. Non-intentional consequences of less strenuous activity can be seen in the work of Dove Bradshaw, especially elegant in minimal images left by the uniform removal with tape of carbon paper surfaces.

All of the works in the show have a meditative resonance, and through both process and effect point to an openness of visual possibility that is a major aspect of Cage's ongoing legacy.